

*Statement of Vista Life Innovations
Appropriations Committee
House Bill 5037
February 24, 2022*

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the committee:

My name is Helen Bosch. I am CEO of Vista Life Innovations, a nationally accredited nonprofit organization supporting adults with disabilities throughout their various stages of life from young adulthood to geriatric support. Participants, called Vista members, are offered structured, highly personalized services through which they gain necessary skills to work and live independently in the local communities. Vista is located in the south-central region of Connecticut but it draws membership from all over the state. Vista members represent 60 different familial hometowns in Connecticut.

Here are some important facts:

- Vista serves about 200 individuals with disabilities annually with a variety of programs and services.
 - All live in community integrated settings.
 - No one lives in group homes.
 - Of those ready for employment, 91% are working.
- The average annual cost for services per individual is estimated to be less than half of what it would cost to support someone in a group home.

Vista receives different types of funding to pay for its services. The public sources include various departments within the State of Connecticut, with the largest being the Department of Developmental Services. DDS pays for many different types of services. But the one we want to speak about today is In-Home Support (IHS) Services. Vista provides In Home Support services both in the home and in the community. It is a 1 to 1 service and allows the individual with a disability to be independent. Vista provides services in areas such as household management, cleaning and organizing, cooking and grocery shopping, bill paying and money management, learning how to access the community and being a good neighbor and roommate. All essential skills. All required to live with independence.

DDS has authorized up to 50,000 hours of In Home Support Services per year for about 60 individuals at Vista who are eligible for funding. The individuals receiving this service have been serviced by Vista for an average of 17 years. We have a proven track record of success. There is nothing broken except the amount of the hourly rate provided to us by DDS.

I am here to ask you to submit in the Budget Adjustment Bill a rate increase from \$34/hour to \$52/hour for this individual service. While my colleagues and I are requesting COLAS of 8% for generalized service rates, even the 8% would not bring this rate to parity with costs and with other rates. The IHS rate is currently set at \$34/hour (all one-to-one direct service). Vista, as an example, spends \$52/hour on each hour of service. Much of the costs are due to the way the rate is structured and the requirements placed upon nonprofits by DDS. In reaching out to other nonprofit providers, the reality about this service is the same. No organization can provide one-to-one services for \$34/hour. It is simple mathematics to calculate our potential loss each year. Our audited financials bear this out.

The consequence of this significant financial loss for Vista is that we are following in the footsteps of our colleagues by not accepting new individuals with this type of funding and we are currently considering the likely probability of not accepting this type of funding at all. That would mean that 60 individuals at our organization alone will be negatively impacted and the State of Connecticut would bear the burden of finding alternatives, which will often be at a greater expense. And, more importantly, innocent individuals and their families would have their lives needlessly torn apart. A preventable tragedy.

It is ironic. The very service that allows individuals with disabilities to live in a least restrictive environment and succeed with an annual cost that is significantly less than the more restrictive options such as group homes, is the one rate that is ignored. Mandatory wage increases, increased regulation and oversight, and expenses associated with properly administering the program all lead to increased costs which are clearly not being addressed by DDS as it ignores the implications of devastating outcomes for our Vista members who are some of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. We have reached out to DDS for help for years. Now, we are reaching out to you.

I will make an offer to all of the members of this committee: Visit us. See what is happening on the shoreline of Connecticut. See the good work and successful outcomes that allow individuals with disabilities to thrive. And look at our annual reports that are submitted to DDS. There is nothing to hide.

And please – for the sake of some very deserving individuals with disabilities throughout this state – include in the Budget Adjustment Bill a greater increase for DDS - In Home Support Services along with the COLA increases being sought here today.

Thank you.